

CLAIMS

We claim:

- 1 1. A system for accepting and storing items for subsequent
2 pickup by a commercial carrier, comprising:
3 an outer housing;
4 means for weighing an item which a customer may intend
5 to ship;
6 means for inputting information relating to the
7 destination of the item from customer;
8 control means for calculating a shipment fee for the
9 item, said control means being in communication with said
10 weighing means and said information inputting means;
11 means in communication with said control means, for
12 accepting identification information relating to eventual
13 payment from the customer, said communication means
14 comprising means for receiving and reading a credit card,
15 means for communicating the charges information to a central
16 location for billing the charges to said customer;
17 a storage area defined by said outer housing; and
18 secure deposit means for permitting a customer to
19 securely deposit the item into the storage area, said secure
20 deposit means including a first zone which serves as a
21 holding space when said item is first placed in the storage
22 area and a secure zone into which the item is moved for
23 secure storage.

- 1 2. The system of claim 1 wherein said system includes
2 means for supplying voice instructions for operation of said
3 system.

1 3. The system of claim 1 wherein said means for
2 communicating comprise a card reader supported in said outer
3 housing and a telephone line connected to said card reader
4 at one end and a credit card service center at the other
5 end.

1 4. The system of claim 1 wherein said means outer housing
2 includes means for measuring the item size and inputting
3 such size into said control means for use in calculating the
4 shipping charge.

1 5. An integrated, automated, unattended unit for
2 collecting and securely holding items for collection and
3 shipment by commercial delivery services, said automated
4 unit comprising:
5 means for weighing the item to be shipped;
6 means for inputting information relating to the
7 destination to which the item is to be shipped;
8 control means for analyzing the inputted information
9 and calculating the fee for shipment of the item; said
10 control means further including means for receiving credit
11 card information and means for communicating and assessing
12 the shipment fee to the account of the person owning the
13 credit card, said means for communicating the shipment fee
14 being by telephone lines;
15 means for securely storing said item until the item is
16 collected by said commercial delivery service;
17 means for storing the inputted information once said
18 item is disposed in said secured storage means.

1 6. The integrated, automated, unattended unit of claim 5
2 including means for printing a hard copy of said manifest.

1 7. The integrated, automated, unattended unit of claim 5
2 wherein said means for storing said information further
3 includes means for communicating said information to a
4 remote location.

1 8. The integrated, automated, unattended unit of claim 5
2 wherein said means for receiving said credit card
3 information comprises a magnetic card reader.

1 9. The integrated, automated, unattended unit of claim 8
2 wherein said fee communicating means includes means for
3 validating said credit card prior to issuing the shipping
4 label.

1 10. An integrated, automated, unattended unit for
2 collecting and securely holding items for collection and
3 shipment by commercial delivery services; said automated
4 unit comprising,
5 means for weighing the item to be shipped;
6 means for inputting information relating to the
7 destination to which the item is to be shipped;
8 control means for analyzing the inputted information
9 and calculating the fee for shipment of the item; said
10 control means further including means for communicating and
11 assessing the shipment fee to the account of the person,
12 said means for communicating the shipment fee being by
13 telephone lines;
14 means for securely storing said item until the item is
15 collected by said commercial delivery service;
16 means for storing the inputted information once said
17 item is disposed in said secure storage means, said
18 information storage means including means for transmitting a
19 manifest to a remote location.

1 11. The integrated, automated, unattended unit of claim 10
2 wherein said fee communicating means includes means for
3 validating said account prior to issuing the shipping label.

1 12. The integrated, automated, unattended unit of claim 10
2 including means for printing a hard copy of said account
3 charge for said person.

1 13. A system for accepting and storing items for subsequent
2 pickup by a commercial carrier, comprising:
3 means for weighing an item which a customer may intend
4 to ship;
5 means for inputting information relating to the
6 destination of the item from customer;
7 control means for calculating a shipment fee for the
8 item, said control means being in communication with said
9 weighing means and said information inputting means;
10 means in communication with said control means, for
11 accepting identification information relating to eventual
12 payment from the customer, said communication means
13 comprising means for communicating the charges information
14 to a central location for billing the charges to said
15 customer;
16 a storage area; and
17 secure deposit means for permitting a customer to
18 securely deposit the item into the storage area, said secure
19 deposit means including a first zone which serves as a
20 holding space when said item is first placed in the storage
21 area and a secure zone into which the item is moved for
22 secure storage and means for conveying said item from said
23 holding space to said storage area.

1 14. A system for accepting and storing item for subsequent
2 pickup by a commercial carrier, comprising:
3 means for weighing an item which a customer may intend
4 to ship, said weighing means being supported by said system;
5 means for inputting information relating to the
6 destination of the item from customer;
7 control means for calculating a shipment fee for the
8 item, said control means being in communication with said
9 weighing means and said information inputting means;
10 means in communication with said control means, for
11 accepting identification information relating to eventual
12 payment from the customer, said communication means
13 comprising means for communicating the charges information
14 to a central location for billing the charges to said
15 customer;
16 a storage area; and
17 secure deposit means for permitting a customer to
18 securely deposit the item into the storage area, said secure
19 deposit means including a first zone which serves as
20 holding space when said item is first placed in the storage
21 area and a secure zone into which the item is moved for
22 secure storage.

1 15. The system of claim 14, wherein said means for
2 communicating comprise a card reader and a telephone line
3 connected to said card reader at one end and a credit card
4 service center at the other end.

1 16. An integrated, automated, unattended unit for
2 collecting and securely holding item for collection and
3 shipment by commercial delivery services; said automated
4 unit comprising,
5 means for weighing the item to be shipped;
6 means for inputting information relating to the
7 destination to which the item is to be shipped;
8 control means for analyzing the inputted information
9 and calculating the fee for shipment of the item; said
10 control means further including means for communicating and
11 assessing the shipment fee to the account of the person,
12 said means assessing comprising means for printing a hard
13 copy of said account charge for said person;
14 means for securely storing said item until the item is
15 collected by said commercial delivery service;
16 means for storing the inputted information once said
17 item is disposed in said secured storage means.

1 17. The integrated, automated, unattended unit of claim 16
2 including means for communicating said account charge to a
3 remote location.

1 18. The integrated, automated, unattended unit of claim 16,
2 wherein said fee communicating means includes means for
3 validating said account prior to issuing the shipping label.

1 19. An integrated, automated, unattended unit for
2 collecting and securely holding items for collection and
3 shipment by commercial delivery services; said automated
4 unit comprising;
5 means for inputting information relating to the
6 destination to which the item is to be shipped;
7 control means for analyzing the inputted information
8 and calculating the fee for shipment of the item; said
9 control means further including means for communicating and
10 assessing the shipment fee to the account of the person,
11 said means for communicating the shipment fee being by
12 telephone lines;
13 means for securely storing said item until the item is
14 collected by said commercial delivery service;
15 means for storing the inputted information once said
16 item is disposed in said secured storage means, said
17 information storage means including means for transmitting
18 information that may be used to prepare a manifest to a
19 remote location.